Naturalist Notebook

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1969

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

JUNE 1969 VOLUME V NO. 6

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Photo by J. Walker

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JUNE

THE MONTH OF AQUATIC INSECTS

June is the month of aquatic insects. Very few of you, I am sure, are aware of the amazing world to be found within the waters of a small pond or stream. Frogs, turtles, fish, and tadpoles are all quickly recognized, but how many of you know about the insects that live all or part of their lives under the water?

Once you have looked carefully at some of these strange creatures you can never forget them. They become more active as June's warm days raise the water temperature. A small dip net dragged along the edge of the pond will capture many of these creatures. Put them in a jar of water and watch them.

Photo by J. Walker

One of the most common insects you will catch is the diving beetle. All black, it swims rapidly through the water carrying his own supply of air with him in the form of a bubble on his chest. When his air runs out he goes to the surface of the pond, takes in a new air supply and carries it back under with him.

Backswimmers have one pair of overly long legs which they use like oars to propell them through the water. As their name implies, they swim on their backs. Water Boatmen have legs similar to the Backswimmer but don't swim upside down.

The larval stages of many insects live in the water and these include the many types of weird looking dragonfly and damselfly larvae. They look like creatures from another world!

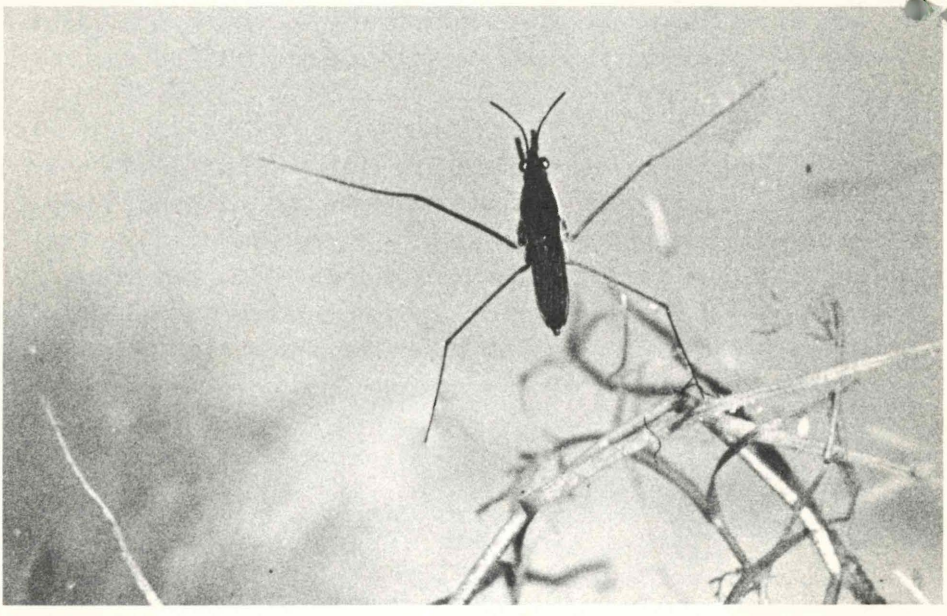


Photo by J. Walker

On the water's surface the Water Striders are the most fun to watch as they skip across the surface on their long, slender legs. Whirligig Beetles are black beetles that madly whirl around on the surface. Their eyes are divided so that they can see above the water and below it - both at the same time!

These are just a few of the strange creatures of the water. Visit a pond area to see these and many others. You will be amazed at what you will find.

JUNE'S CALENDAR

June is the month of hot days and, unfortunately, mosquitoes.

June 1... Hawkweeds - both orange and yellow - flower in the fields.

June 3... Mountain Laurel-our State Flower-is in bloom.

June 3... Daisies come into flower.

June 5... Least Bitterns arrive to nest in cattail swamps.

June 8... Mars is closest to the earth on this day.

June 12... Warm nights are times when the whip-porwill calls constantly.

June 14... Fireflies flash in the warm evenings in fields.

June 18-23... The longest days of the year - 15 hrs. and 19 mins.

June 21... Summer begins at 8:55 A.M.

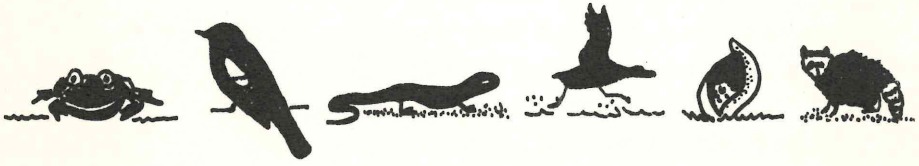
June 23... The rarely seen rails may be found in early morning or late evening along the edge of marshes.

June 24... The white Pyrola flowers are found in the woodlands.

June 27... Indian Pipes are up in our woodlands.

June 29... The Full Hot Moon.

June 30... Early nesting birds such as bluebirds and phoebes have laid eggs to begin their second family of the summer.



TALES FROM PEQUOT HILL

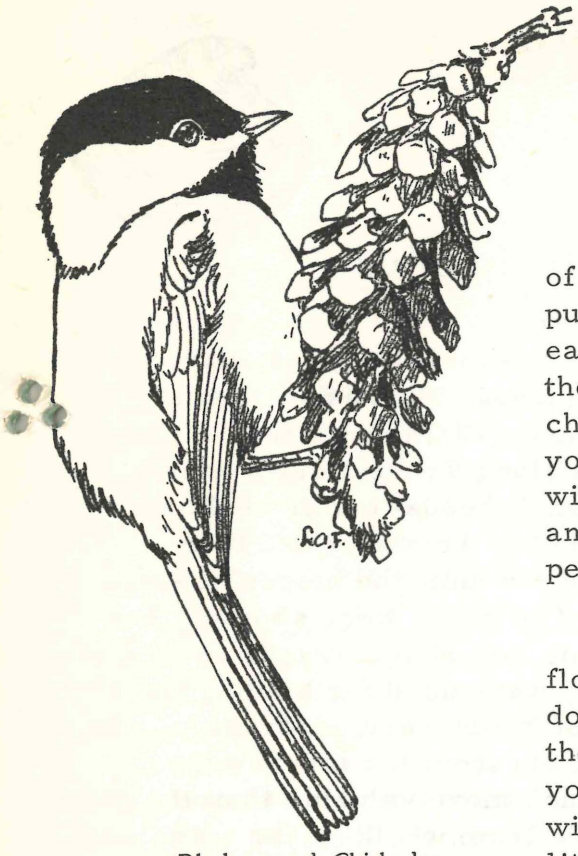
by TRUDY GARDNER

Looking out our window we see many different birds. One cheerful little ball of feathers that makes its home at Pequot Hill year around is the Black-capped Chickadee. This tiny bird has a way of perking you up on a cold winter day with his happy song "chick-a-dee-dee-dee". Watching him work on the twigs and ends of branches looking for insect eggs as he hangs head down like an acrobat can't help but make you laugh.

The chickadee is different from his other bird friends in that his feathers never change color (like the goldfinch) from one season to another. Also, his mate looks just like him and does not have a different colored dress like the mother cardinal.

When it comes to nest building if there is no bird house available the chickadee will dig out a hole from some decaying tree and line it with moss, feathers, and any other soft materials he can find. Then after the nest is completed Mrs. Chickadee will lay seven or eight little speckled white eggs which both parents take turns sitting on from eleven to fourteen days until they hatch - then the fun begins. At first the youngsters do not eat very much, but before they leave the nest when they are about twelve days old their appetites keep both parents on the jump from early morning to night finding food for them.

It has been proved that just one chickadee can destroy several hundred insect eggs in one day. Now that it is summertime these birds also eat caterpillars and other insect pests.



Black-capped Chickadee

Chickadees are fond of sunflower seeds so we put out a small handful each day as a treat for them; it also gives us a chance to see the new youngsters up close with their black bibs and black caps and perky tails.

If you plant some sunflowers in your garden you don't need to harvest the seed; the chickadees will do it for you and you will be rewarded with the company of this happy little bird.

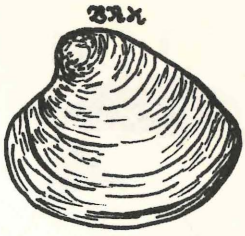
–STORE SALE–

We would like to clear out the old stock of books and other items such as bird feeders, plaques, games, etc. from the store before summer – thus we are offering all members 25% off on all store sales during June.

The store is open from 1 to 5 – Seven days a Week.

ALONG THE SHORE

by BARBARA KASHANSKI



THE WAMPUM CLAM

Perhaps most of you know this very familiar clam by its common name of Quahog or hardshell clam. Where did the name Wampum Clam come from? The coastal Indians who lived along Connecticut's shores used to make Wampum (shell beads) out of whelk and Quahog shells. They broke up the shells and then drilled and rubbed them down until the pieces of shell were smooth and round. The beads were about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch long, and were strung into short strands or woven into belts. Wampum belts were used for binding treaties and the shorter strands of beads were for trading. The purple beads that were made from the inside edge of the Quahog shell were much more valuable than the more common white beads made from whelk or the white part of the clam.

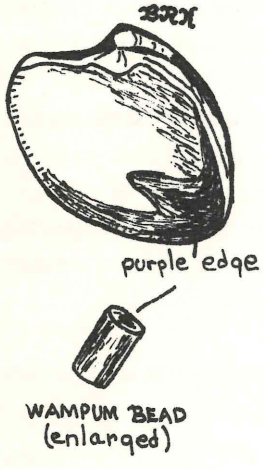
The Indians not only used the Wampum Clam to make their "money", but also as a main source of food. They taught the pilgrims how to catch and cook their delicious clams and the white man has enjoyed eating them ever since. The full grown Atlantic Coast Quahog is usually 3 to 5 inches and is used in chowders because the meat of these larger clams is apt to be tough.

A clam has two tubes call siphons that are located in the "neck". Water comes in one of the tubes bringing in food and oxygen and goes out the other carrying waste material. Water goes through the clam remarkably fast. Three quarts of water may go through

in an hour. Clams breathe by means of gills. The gills also catch little bits of food in the water which are sent toward the mouth by the small waving hairs on the gills.

The Wampum clam has a "little neck" and lies just below the surface of the mud within the low tide mark where its short siphons in the "neck" can reach up into the water for food. Because it has to lie near the surface of the sand or mud Quahogs are easily found. If you're the type of person who doesn't mind a little mud you can use the Indian method of "treading out clams" with your toes. The smooth hard round shell is easily felt at low tide and in no time at all your foot has found you your next meal. Where you find one you'll probably find more because Quahogs group together in 'beds'.

The Quahog gets where it needs to go by dragging itself with one 'foot'. First, the clam pushes the foot out between the two shells which are standing on edge in the sand. The foot then stretches ahead and swells at the end. The swollen end anchors itself; then the foot shrinks or contracts which pulls the clam through the sand like a plow. When the body of the clam reaches the 'anchor', the foot stretches out again, swells, contracts, and pulls the clam forward again. This may not be the fastest way to travel but it is plenty fast enough for the clam. And just think-if clams could move quickly-could we catch them as easily for our next delicious meal from along the shore.



WAMPUM BEAD
(enlarged)

ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

FIELD TRIP PREPARATION

Now that the weather is getting warmer all good rockhounds should be planning field trips.

It is important to consider a list of tools and materials needed on field trips.

1. A Rock Hammer is a very important item.

2. Chisels or Stardrill can be helpful, but are not necessary.

3. A Canvas Collecting Bag for specimens is a must. (Paper Bags are okay as a substitute.)

4. Newspaper to wrap good specimens in is another important item.

5. Maps and Information on reaching the collecting area should be included.

6. Safety Glasses are an important safety factor to consider when using a hammer (always use these when breaking rocks).

7. A First Aid Kit should accompany any collector on these trips.

Starting next month, a short series of field trip locations will be covered in this article.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK . . . .

We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . . .

YOUR WILL: Most of you as members are aware of the tremendous growth of the Science Center in the past few years. We are sure that many of you want to see us continue to grow to help both children and adults become more aware of our natural environment. May we suggest that you remember the Science Center in your will. We suggest the following bequest form: I hereby give, devise, and bequeath to the Thames Science Center, Inc. in the City of New London, in the State of Connecticut, the sum of . . . . . dollars (or otherwise describe the gift) to be used for the general purpose of the Center.

DDT: The ultimate has finally been reached. For some time now scientists have been aware that DDT residues cause calcium deficiencies and cause egg shells to be very thin. On April 13th, Audubon researchers found a Bald Eagle nest on the shores of Lake Superior in northern Michigan which contained the ultimate in an egg - no shell, just a membrane! Here is a harsh and frightening example of what pesticides are doing in our environment. This must stop! For the Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Peregrine Falcon it may already be too late.

SIGN OF PROGRESS? ? ? Secretary of Transportation John Volpe noted that in New York City today traffic moves an average of 6 miles per hour versus 11 miles per hour in the pushcart era of 1917.

YOUR OWN BREEDING BIRD CENSUS

by Robert Dewire

In the early summer, ornithologists are able to get a fairly accurate idea of the numbers of birds nesting in a particular area. This type of census can be conducted on a much smaller scale in any area. All that is needed is that you know some of the common birds at least by sight and, if possible, by hearing their songs. The more types of birds you are familiar with, the more interesting your results will be. Even if the only birds you know are ones such as cardinal, nuthatch, blue jay, robin, catbird, and chickadee, you can still have an enjoyable time with this project.

The first thing you must do is make a map of the area that you will be covering. A good area to do which you would be familiar with is the area of your property. A park, woods or any other area having some trees would do just as well. For your map, all you need are the boundaries of the area to be covered and any outstanding features such as your house, trees, and bushes. See the map at the end of this article as an example.

Next you should walk around your area and see how many birds you are familiar with are present. Try and identify any you don't know. After finding out how many birds are present make up one map for each species. You are now ready to begin the census.

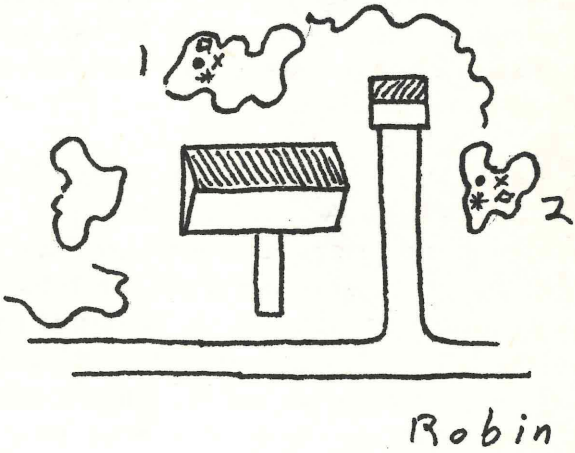
You should try and take at least four walks a week through the area. The best times are early morning (before 8:30 A. M.) and evening (after 6:00 P. M.).

Whenever you hear or see a particular bird, say a robin, you should mark the location on your map for that species. Use a different mark for each walk you take. Trips should be made from June 1 to mid-July.

After several trips you should notice that in certain spots there will be a cluster of marks for a particular bird. This indicates a territory which means that a bird is nesting somewhere around that spot. Counting up the number of clusters you have will tell you how many robins, blue jays, etc. are nesting in the area you covered. You may find a nest in your trips and if so watch and see if it is successful or not.

Doing this from year to year allows you to see changes that take place in the numbers and types of birds. If you are making the study in your own yard it will be doubly interesting to know what plantings you have are used by the birds.

The diagram of a backyard shown below illustrates two nesting robins where the clusters of marks are.



CONNECTICUT CREATURES *by MIKE WALKER*

Through the driving Spring rain I could see that a dog had brought a smaller animal to bay on the road ahead of us. I was driving the Science Center's Van and my wife Joan was following in our car. I signaled a stop and we pulled over as far as possible on the narrow road. I jumped out of the truck, my unbuttoned raincoat billowing in the wind like Batman's cape, and advanced on the dog, shouting threats and abuses. The dog, faced with this apparition, fled down the road. His intended victim, meanwhile, had disappeared like a wind-blown leaf. I stared about in disbelief. The rain-spattered road was empty. My wife joined me and together we searched the shoulders and peered under the vehicles. Then suddenly I spotted a low slung furry shape making off down the side of the road behind our car.

I easily caught up with the animal, which promptly turned and charged my feet. I danced out of the way, but the creature's blood was up, and he rushed me again and again. I was hopping around in the middle of the road like the fellow in a Western who's having his feet shot at. I interrupted Joan's laughter to ask her to bring me an old plastic hat box, used for transporting rats and mice, from the truck.

I held the open box down at my feet, let my little assailant charge into it, and clapped on the cover before he could rebound. Back at the Center we transferred him to larger quarters and had a closer look at him. About the size of a half-grown cat, he was built much closer to the ground. His pelt was lusterous. Rich chocolate brown above, it lightened to ginger on his stomach. His front legs were very short but the hind pair was stout, with strong webbing between the toes. His nearly hairless tail was compressed vertically, like a sculling oar. While we examined him, our captive peered myopically at us through a pair of small brown eyes.

Our animal was the Common Muskrat, Connecticut's third largest rodent, ranking after the beaver and woodchuck in size.

A semi-aquatic mammal, the muskrat is at home in swamps, meadow streams and small pnds, and is seldom found far from water. The muskrat's usual dwelling is a circular mound of rushes, reeds, and cattails, built right in the water. The entrance is below the water line and leads to a dry chamber above the water level. There, the female may raise as many as three or four litters of young during the Spring and Summer. There are usually 4-8 babies which develop so rapidly that they are on their own in less than a month.

The muskrat is mainly a vegetarian, and cattails and other aquatic plants form the bulk of his diet. Since his capture, our muskrat has done nicely on rabbit pellets, liberally supplemented with romaine, pears, apples, and peaches.

Originally, we planned to keep our muskrat only long enough to photograph, but we discovered that he has lost the use of one of his front feet, perhaps in his scuffle with the dog. In addition, he has become quite a settled and amiable fellow, though he won't allow you to touch him. All of us who daily stoke him with food can attest to a prodigious appetite. These considerations, plus the fact that he is obviously an old male, gone grey around the muzzle, have led us to decide to keep him, at least for the time being.

He is not on public view yet, but we are planning on exhibit around him for early summer.

Photo by J. Walker

FIELD NOTES

April 15-May 15

As is the usual case with this period, the reports are so numerous that I must change the format of the column for this issue. The "notes" will be given as reports of first observations on a day to day basis rather than by area. Generally speaking, flowers were a few days behind last year's dates early in the period but the warm weather since April 26 has resulted in both flowers blooming a few days earlier and birds arriving from the South earlier.

April 18 - SPICEBUSH in flower at the Peace Sanctuary.

April 19 - DUTCHMAN'S BREECHES flowered in the Arboretum.

April 20 - BLOODROOT and HEPATICA flowered in the Arboretum and PURPLE MARTINS arrived in Stonington.

April 22 - A GREEN HERON arrived at a pond on Shewville Road in Ledyard.

April 24 - A BROAD-WINGED HAWK flew over Wamphassuc Point Road in Stonington.

April 25 - PURPLE TRILLIUM flowered in the Arboretum.

April 26 - MARSH MARIGOLD and WOOD ANENOME flowered at the Peace Sanctuary and a BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER arrived there. Three GLOSSY IBIS were at Barn Island.

April 27 - First arriving birds included a RED-START at the Arboretum, SOLITARY VIREO at Mitchell's Woods, HUMMINGBIRD at Magonk Point, PALM WARBLER at the Peace Sanctuary, CATBIRD at Shewville Road, CATTLE EGRET at Quonochontaug, R. I. and a SHOVELER DUCK at Galilee, R. I.

April 28 - SHADBUSH flowered at the Peace Sanctuary, CHIMNEY SWIFTS arrived in Essex, and an

adult YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT HERON was in the Harkness inlet. An uncommon WORM SNAKE was caught at Oil Mill Road, Waterford.

April 29 - PUSSY TOES flowered at the Peace Sanctuary. PRAIRIE and BLUE-WINGED WARBLERS in the Arboretum, HOUSE WRENS at Grove Ave., Mystic, and SEMIPALMATED and LEAST SANDPIPERS and a LESSER YELLOWLEGS at Weekapaug, R. I. were arrivals.

April 30 - WOOD THRUSH arrived in the Arboretum, YELLOW WARBLER at Magonk Pt., and a SHOVELER at Harkness Park.

May 1 - A BALTIMORE ORIOLE was in Mystic and 3 ORCHARD ORIOLES were in Lyme.

May 2 - First arrivals were WHITE-EYED VIREO in the Arboretum, CATTLE EGRET at Magonk Point, COMMON TERNS at Harkness Park, WHIPPOORWILL at Oil Mill Rd., BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER at Barn Island, and FISH CROW at Pawcatuck.

May 3 - A YELLOWTHROAT at Willow Pt. and PARULA WARBLER at the Peace Sanctuary.

May 4 - SEMIPALMATED PLOVER at Groton Long Point and LEAST TERN at Barn Is.

May 5 - WORM-EATING WARBLER and LOUISIANA WATER THRUSH at the Arboretum, a VEERY and BLACK-THROATED-GREEN WARBLER at Lake of Isles in Ledyard, and a RED-HEADED WOODPECKER in Groton.

May 6 - BELLWORT in flower at the Peace Sanctuary. SPOTTED SANDPIPER in Essex, GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH at Mitchell's Woods and CRESTED FLYCATCHER in the Peace Sanctuary.

May 7 - One male EVENING GROSBEAK still at a feeder in Quaker Hill.

May 8 - APPLE BLOSSOMS in bloom at the Center. ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK and WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW at Hidden Acres in Groton and a HOODED WARBLER at Great Neck Road in Waterford.

May 9 - A spectacular event took place due to the storm and high southerly winds on this day. PHALAROPES, rarely seen close to shore, were blown in by the hundreds along the coast from Millstone Point throughout Rhode Island. This was unprecedented in this area and some of them stayed through the 12th. Two of the three species, the RED and NORTHERN were seen.

May 10 - A SCARLET TANAGER was seen in Essex and a KINGBIRD at the Peace Sanctuary. BOBOLINKS were at Dimmock Road.

May 11 - COLUMBINE flowered at the Peace Sanctuary.

May 12 - New arrivals included BAY-BREAST, MAGNOLIA, BLACKPOLL, and WILSON'S WARBLERS. Also an INDIGO BUNTING in Lyme.

May 13 - RED-EYED VIREO and NASHVILLE WARBLER were at the Arboretum.

May 14 - Small flocks of warblers were in evidence in several areas and included such species as BLACK-POLL, MAGNOLIA, CANADA, YELLOW, BLUE-WING and PARULA. A TENNESSEE WARBLER was seen at the Science Center.

May 15 - The first BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLERS were at the Arboretum and a NORTHERN WATER-THRUSH was at the Science Center.

Contributors to this column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Barbara Bonanno, Lawrence Brooks, Greg Butcher, Mr. and Mrs. Earl Canfield, Bob and Mary Jean Dewire, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Eastman, John J. Gardner, Trudy Gardner, Helen Gilman, Virginia Hatchell, Barbara Kashanski, Audrey King, Sam Knox, Mary Laffargue, Margaret MacGregor, Maynard Peterson, Mike Walker, and John Williams.

ACTIVITIES FOR JUNE

June 11...6:30 P.M. Barn Island. A trip to see life in the marsh in the evening. Meet at the State Boat Landing.

June 14...10:00 A.M. A Junior Jaunt for children in grades 4, 5, and 6 in the Conn. College Arboretum. The trip will be to see animals that live there. Limit of 10 children. Registration required. Children should meet at the entrance to the Arboretum.

June 18...6:30 P.M. Harkness Memorial State Park. An evening field trip to see the plants and animals of the park. Meet at the Harkness Parking Lot.

THE SCIENCE CENTER'S ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE STUDY DAY CAMP

Four two week sessions: Begin June 30th

Session I Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve

Session II Connecticut Arboretum

Session III A Natural Area in Lyme

Session IV A Private Beach Area in Waterford

Fee is $20.00 per session.

Children must have completed the required grade for a group by June 1969

Program is for children in grades 1 to 6

Members who did not receive a brochure may obtain one by calling the Center at 443-4295.

Registration closes June 20th.

NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

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John F. Gardner
Editor

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Spotted Turtle

Photo by
J. Walker